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Harpist Yolanda Kondonassis is nominated for 2020 GRAMMY Award in the Best Classical Instrumental Solo Category

World Premiere Recording of Jennifer Higdon's Harp Concerto on *American Rapture* (Azica Records) with Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra led by Ward Stare



Photo by Michael Cavotta available in high resolution upon request.

"Higdon's concerto ... is a delight ... Throughout, Kondonassis' playing is a delicious thrill." – *Gramophone*

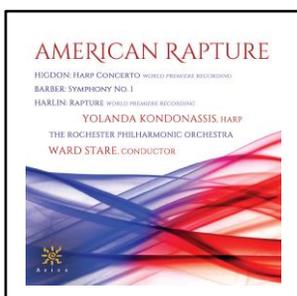
"A pioneering force for harpists everywhere, Kondonassis distinguishes Higdon's concerto with her customary expressivity and impeccable technique." – *Textura*

"[Kondonassis] brings it all to life and commands attention with seemingly limitless vibrance and color." – *Cleveland Plain Dealer*

"the crystalline precision of Yolanda Kondonassis's harp, the rhythmic buoyancy of Stare's conducting, and the cohesion of the orchestra achieve a kind of mystical alchemy." – *CITY Newspaper*

www.yolandaharp.com

New York, NY – Harpist **Yolanda Kondonassis** is nominated for a **2020 GRAMMY Award** in the **Best Classical Instrumental Solo** category for her world premiere recording of **Jennifer Higdon's Harp Concerto** with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra led by Music Director Ward Stare. Higdon's Harp Concerto is also nominated for **Best Contemporary Classical Composition**. The album, *American Rapture*, was produced by Alan Bise and mastered by Bruce Egre. It was recorded live September 17-20, 2018 in Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre and released May 17, 2019 on Azica Records.



Pulitzer Prize-winner Jennifer Higdon's Harp Concerto was written for and dedicated to Yolanda Kondonassis. Kondonassis notes, "The journey of bringing Jennifer Higdon's Harp Concerto to life has been an amazing ride. We agreed on many aspects of what a new harp concerto should be – strong, agile, lyrical, feisty, energetic and even heroic when necessary; I wanted it to be challenging, but really fun to play and with a groove that would allow the harpist to catch a musical wave with the orchestra once in a while. Jennifer managed all this and more, delivering a work that is all at once powerful, heart-wrenching, whimsical, and original."

The Harp Concerto is a consortium commission from the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra, Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra, Fargo-Moorhead Symphony Orchestra, Lansing Symphony Orchestra, and the Oklahoma City Philharmonic Orchestra.

Yolanda performed the work with all six of the commissioning orchestras during the 2018-19 concert season. A second weekend of concerts with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra kicked off the season in September of 2018 and was recorded live for the *American Rapture* album. Yolanda will perform the concerto again in January of 2020 with the Wichita Symphony Orchestra.

More critical acclaim for Yolanda Kondonassis' recording of Jennifer Higdon's Harp Concerto

"Kondonassis has the clearest, cleanest harp technique I have ever encountered. Never smeary or precious, she navigates the intricate passages of Higdon's Harp Concerto superbly and keeps the harp well balanced with the orchestra." – *I Care If You Listen*

"The Higdon Harp Concerto of 2018 is a real find ... [Higdon] outdoes herself here. For one thing, the harpist is Yolanda Kondonassis, for whom Higdon wrote the work; [Kondonassis] is an exceptional player, both charismatic and versatile ... Cleveland's small Azica label achieves world-class results at Rochester's Kodak Hall. Recommended." – *AllMusic*

"The excitement in Kodak Hall was palpable on that September night in 2018. The Rochester Philharmonic was recording the world premiere of Jennifer Higdon's Harp Concerto with Yolanda Kondonassis and RPO music director Ward Stare. By the end of the night, we knew we were in for a very special release." – *Classical Minnesota Public Radio*

"Yolanda Kondonassis plays a mean harp, and Jennifer Higdon has written a lovely concerto to exploit her abilities ... This is, in short, a serious addition to the modern repertoire for harp and orchestra, and I recommend both the work and the performance highly." – *Classics Today*

"The standout here ... is the glorious Jennifer Higdon Harp Concerto ... a truly great concerto for the instrument. It is bright, playful, and engaging. Her writing for the harp (and Kondonassis' seemingly easy grasp of astounding virtuosity and lyricism) work well with the orchestral writing, making for a very satisfying listening experience." – *New Music Buff*

"Like Ginastera, Higdon has extended the [harp] beyond its usual playing parameters with a myriad of percussion-like effects encountered on this amazing journey. Will the instrument ever be the same again?" – *Limelight Magazine*

"The internationally acclaimed harpist Yolanda Kondonassis is the dedicatee of the concerto and, not surprisingly, plays it with utter authority, as if she's the conduit directly from the composer. She captures the spirit of the work and confidently negotiates the tricky writing with seeming ease. She plays with a nuance and subtlety in her phrasing, with all-encompassing technique ..." – *MusicWeb International*

"the crystalline precision of Yolanda Kondonassis's harp, the rhythmic buoyancy of Stare's conducting, and the cohesion of the orchestra achieve a kind of mystical alchemy" – *CITY Newspaper*

"Kondonassis elicits maximum tone, sparkle, energy, virtuosity and beauty(!) from her instrument; she seems to conjure up effortless power, coupling that with ravishing nuance and subtlety." – *Wisconsin Public Radio*

"Ms. Kondonassis' technique is spot-on, seesawing from playful to acerbic when the music demands ... Slap pizz, percussion, and Ms. Kondonassis' knuckles against the sound board remind us that the harp is not all angelic ladies in long gowns, she can also climb trees and skin her knees with the best of them. Ms. Kondonassis does not hold back, and it just gives you chills realizing this is what the harp can do!" – *Harp Column*

"Yolanda Kondonassis brings this record in all its elegance and sensitivity to the harp, in the service of an interpretation that never forgets the overall narrative flow." – *ConcertoNet.com*

"At the [world premiere] performances, Kondonassis' musicality shaped the flow of the slow first and third movements, and her unerring rhythms were the backbone of both fast movements. Precision with flexibility was her hallmark." – *American Record Guide*

Yolanda Kondonassis is celebrated as one of the world's premier solo harpists and is widely regarded as today's most recorded classical harpist. With "a range of colour that's breathtaking" (*Gramophone*), she has been hailed as "a brilliant and expressive player" (*Dallas Morning News*), with "a dazzling technique unfailingly governed by impeccable musical judgment" (*Detroit News*). She has appeared around the globe as a concerto soloist and in recital, bringing her unique brand of musicianship and warm artistry to an ever-increasing audience. Also a published author, speaker, professor of harp, and environmental activist, her many passions are woven into a vibrant and multi-faceted career. With hundreds of thousands of discs and downloads sold worldwide, Kondonassis' extensive discography includes twenty titles and her 2008 release, *Air* (Telarc), was nominated for a Grammy Award. *Ginastera: One Hundred*, celebrates Ginastera's 2016 centennial and was released in October 2016 on Oberlin Music. Her many albums have earned universal critical praise as she continues to be a pioneering force in the harp world, striving to push the boundaries of what listeners expect of the harp. The recipient of two Solo Recitalists Grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and a 2011 recipient of the Cleveland Arts Prize, Kondonassis has been featured on CNN and PBS as well as Sirius/XM Radio's *Symphony Hall*, NPR's *All Things Considered* and *Tiny Desk Concerts*, *St. Paul Sunday Morning*, and *Performance Today*. In addition to her active solo, chamber music and recording schedule, Kondonassis heads the harp departments at Oberlin Conservatory of Music and The Cleveland Institute of Music, and presents masterclasses around the world. For more information, visit www.YolandaHarp.com.

Jennifer Higdon, Pulitzer Prize and two-time Grammy winner, is one of the most performed living American composers working today. She is a major figure in contemporary Classical music, receiving the 2010 Pulitzer Prize in Music for her Violin Concerto, a 2010 Grammy for her Percussion Concerto and a 2018 Grammy for her Viola Concerto. Most recently, Higdon received the prestigious Nemmers Prize from Northwestern University which is given to contemporary classical composers of exceptional achievement who have significantly influenced the field of composition. She has also been the recipient of a Guggenheim, Koussevitzky, and Pew Fellowships, as well as two awards from the American Academy of Arts & Letters. Higdon enjoys several hundred performances a year of her works, and *blue cathedral* is one of today's most performed contemporary orchestral works, with more than 600 performances worldwide. Her works have been recorded on more than sixty CDs. Higdon's first opera, *Cold Mountain*, won the prestigious International Opera Award for Best World Premiere and the opera recording was nominated for 2 Grammy awards. Dr. Higdon holds the Rock Chair in Composition at The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Her music is published exclusively by Lawdon Press. For more information, visit www.jenniferhigdon.com.

Ward Stare was appointed the twelfth music director of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra in 2014 and has been hailed by *The Chicago Tribune* as "a rising star in the conducting firmament." Praised by *The New York Times* for "inspiring musicians to impressive heights," his numerous guest conducting appearances include engagements with the symphony orchestras of Baltimore, Sydney, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Detroit, and Toronto, as well as with the New World Symphony and Calgary Philharmonic. He made his debut with the Metropolitan Opera in 2017, conducting nine performances of Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow* with Grammy-winning mezzo-soprano Susan Graham in the title role. His frequent collaborations with the Lyric Opera of Chicago began in 2012, conducting a production of *Hansel and Gretel*, returning in 2013 for *Die Fledermaus*, and again in 2014 to lead *Porgy and Bess* to rave reviews. Stare served as resident conductor of the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra from 2008 to 2012 and made his highly successful Carnegie Hall debut with the orchestra in 2009, stepping in to lead H. K. Gruber's *Frankenstein*. Stare has enjoyed an ongoing relationship with the SLSO and returns frequently as guest conductor. As a passionate advocate for arts education, Ward Stare has served as a Distinguished Artist at the Robert McDuffie Center for Strings at Mercer University since 2012. Stare is an enthusiastic collaborator and champion of new music, including the world premiere performance of 'Pravda,' by Academy Award-winning composer Elliot Goldenthal and the regional premiere of Pulitzer Prize and Grammy-winning composer Aaron Jay Kernis' *Flute Concerto*. *American Rapture* marks Ward Stare's first recording with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra. For more information, visit www.wardstare.com.

The **Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO)** has been committed to musical excellence since its founding in 1922. The RPO presents approximately 150 concerts and broadcasts a year, serves up to 170,000 people per year through ticketed events, education and community engagement activities, and regularly offers concerts in schools and community centers throughout the upstate New York region. Music Director Ward Stare joins the ranks of former notable RPO music directors, including Eugene Goossens, José Iturbi, Erich Leinsdorf, David Zinman and Conductor Laureate Christopher Seaman. Dedicated to educating and inspiring the next generation of musicians and classical music fans, the RPO reaches thousands of young people every year through its uniquely-designed programs for school-aged children. For more information, visit www.rpo.org.